

*It's  
True  
in  
Alaska*

Warren Roberts

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***A Collection of Little Known Facts About the 49th State***

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The following is a collection of facts about Alaska which are not known to many of the people in the rest of our country. There are undoubtedly numerous others as interesting but this sampling will serve to give the casual observer a few things to think about (and to talk about, too, perhaps).

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Alaska's Big Game Animals

Alaska's Brown Bears, familiarly known as Brownies, and the Kodiak Bears are the largest carnivorous animals in the world. Just the sight of their tracks in a muddy spot is enough to scare the wits out of a brave man. It is claimed by some that the Polar Bear of the Arctic may be as large or even larger than the giant brown bears. So far the claim has not been authenticated. It is based largely on stories of the great white bear told by Eskimo hunters.



# # #

Did you know that there is a lake in Alaska that periodically dumps itself? It is true. Late in the summer each year, Lake George, the self-dumping lake breaks its icy barrier and its waters go rushing down Knik River and into Cook Inlet. The rapidly rising water level of the river, with its madly swirling chunks of ice, soon overflows its banks in various places, covering many acres with flood water and inundating highways and even homes at times. It soon recedes however and in a few hours the roads are passable again and in a matter of a few days the swollen river is back to normal.

# # #

In the far northern regions of Alaska the summer sun shines for several weeks without setting, just sinking low in the sky in the late evening and then rising higher. By the same token, in winter it never rises at all for a few weeks.

# # #

Alaska has so many sounds, bays and inlets that its coastline is considerably longer than that of the continental United States.



The Arctic Hare has an unusual characteristic that is seldom beheld by human eyes. One or more of these creatures will suddenly rear up on their hind feet and will all hop along together on their hind toes—kangaroo fashion. Sometimes as many as a dozen will perform together and for what reason, nobody knows.

# # #

There are birds in Alaska that dance. The Lesser Sandhill Crane or Little Brown Crane as it is sometimes called, does a mating dance that resembles a grotesque minuet. This strange dance begins when the male bird turns his back on the female of his choice and proceeds to bow low to the ground with wings trailing; then he turns to face her. She executes the same step and faces the male. Then they bow even lower to each other. Next comes a series of jerky hops and jumps followed by more low bows to either side. After several bows to the side the weird dancers produce more awkward hops and so it goes until they are weary. Other couples often join in the fun and it is a most ludicrous performance but amusing for the spectator. The dances are usually performed during the spring courting season but on occasion they are witnessed during the fall migration.

# # #

The highest mountain on the North American continent is located in the Alaska Range in the interior of Alaska. Mt. McKinley rises to a majestic height of 20,320 feet above sea level. To make its ascent is the goal of mountaineers of many lands. Sometimes during the climbing season there are several climbing parties attempting the assault at one time. The Great One has had its share of accidents and there have been spectacular rescues effected by air and otherwise.



There are Red Squirrels in Alaska that appear to be trapeze artists. Sometimes such a fellow will snatch a choice morsel of food, dash up a convenient tree and proceed to swing from a branch by his hind feet as he devours his tidbit. Being upside down as he eats bothers him not a whit.

# # #

It spite of its northern latitude, it is true that Alaska has many water sports enthusiasts. Skin diving, water skiing, swimming and all sorts of boating are enjoyed in summer. There's no dodging of icebergs either!

# # #

It is possible to view more than a hundred lakes at one time from certain strategic elevations in Alaska. Those who travel the air lanes can, of course, see many more.

# # #



The sport of racing stock cars on ice is becoming more popular with each passing season. It is often a featured event of the winter festivals such as the annual Fur Rendezvous in Anchorage.

# # #

It is true that there is a fish (Alaska Blackfish) in certain northern Alaska waters that is frozen solid for weeks at a time and when thawed will swim nonchalantly away about its business. Another finny oddity is the Alaska Greenfish. This peculiar creature has grass green flesh, occasionally bright blue.

# # #

Educational standards are high in the 49th state and its schools are among the best in the nation. Teachers' salaries are comparatively high too. There are two universities in the state. The University of Alaska is located at College, near Fairbanks. The Alaska Methodist University is a new institution and is situated just outside of Anchorage.

Yes, orchids do grow in Alaska. Not the giant varieties that grow as parasites on trees in some parts of the tropics but several species of terrestrial orchids grow wild in Alaska. *Cypripedium* (Lady Slippers) and *Calypso* (Fairy Slippers) are two of the loveliest.

# # #



*Cypripedium*  
Lady Slipper

There are more planes per capita in Anchorage than in any other American city. Many of them are fitted with pontoons for landing on water. Others are equipped with skis in winter to facilitate landing. Those equipped with skis have been known to land on mud flats. Alaskans are the "flyingest people" ever, or so it has been said.

# # #

Airliners fly NORTH from Alaska to reach European destinations. Such lines as Scandinavian Air System, Japan Air Lines, Royal Dutch and Air France stop at the International Airport just outside Anchorage en route to the cities of Europe.

# #

The legal age for voting in America's farthest north state is 19. A prospective voter must be an Alaskan resident for at least a year in order to cast his ballot.

# # #

Alaska has reserves of almost all known minerals. Most of them are not now being exploited, however. There is even a mountain of excellent jade in the Arctic portion of the state.

# # #

Did you know that there are no snakes in Alaska? Well—it's true. There are frogs, however. Alaskan dogs don't have fleas either.



It is true that our national bird, the Bald Eagle, is becoming rare in many parts of the country. It is also true that there is no scarcity of them in Alaska. In fact, they gather by the thousands in the Chilkat Valley, near Haines, when the salmon are running. Salmon trollers say they can tell where to fish by the prevalence of the Bald Eagles.

# # #

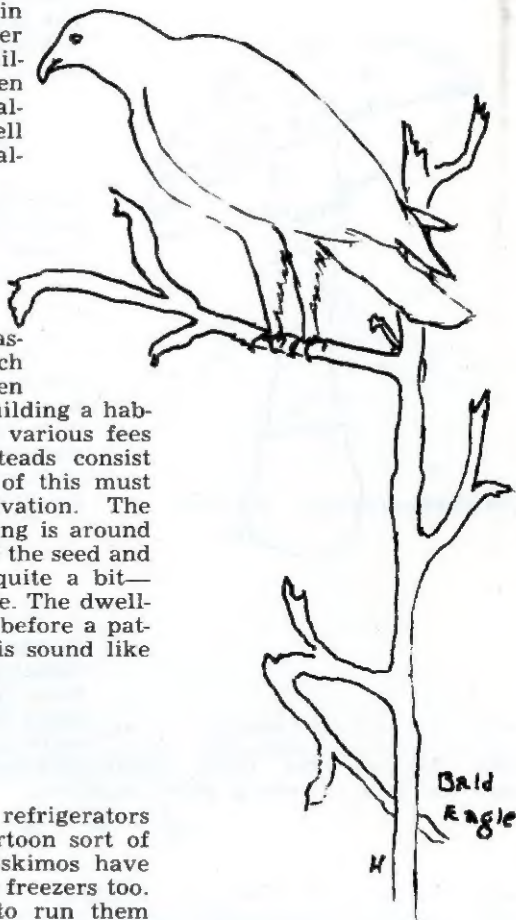
There is no free land in Alaska. Homesteads and other such lands are far from free when the cost of clearing land, building a habitable dwelling and paying various fees is considered. Most homesteads consist of 160 acres and 20 acres of this must be cleared and under cultivation. The average cost for land clearing is around \$100.00 an acre. Add to that the seed and fertilizer and it will cost quite a bit—more than many people have. The dwelling must be completed too, before a patent is granted. Does all this sound like it's free?

# # #

The salesman who can sell refrigerators to the Eskimos is not a cartoon sort of person in Alaska. Many Eskimos have refrigerators and some have freezers too. Wherever there is power to run them and the cash to buy with, the Eskimos delight in owning refrigerators. They need them as much as anyone else. It is much easier to store food in a refrigerator than it is to use the ice caves that once did duty as cold storage.

# # #

The dainty sky blue Forget-me-not is Alaska's state flower and the Ptarmigan is the state bird.



A wide variety of edible mushrooms grow in Alaska. Several pounds may be garnered from one small patch if a good one is located. The beautiful but deadly bright red and white Amanita is also plentiful here.

# # #

Some bars in Alaska use ice from nearby glaciers to chill their beverages!

# # #

It is true that the liver of the polar bear is so rich in Vitamin A that it is not safe for human consumption. It may not be fatal to partake of it but the stuff is so potent that it will almost certainly make one ill.

# # #

Amanita



orful festivals and many other photogenic subjects all combine to make residents extremely photo conscious.

# # #

Most species of big game is on the increase in Alaska, due to a more realistic and enlightened management policy.

# # #

Dog teams are still used for hauling and for transportation in many parts of the state, particularly in the Arctic portions. Sled dog racing is one of the most popular sports events at any gathering. Thousands of spectators throng to watch the major races held annually in Fairbanks, Tok and Anchorage. Races with less money on them have been inaugurated in recent years in Soldotna, Willow, etc.

Many volcanoes in the Aleutian Islands are active and put on big shows now and then.

# # #

There are many oil wells in Alaska and much of the state's income is derived from the lease of potential oil lands. Most of the leading petroleum companies of the United States have extensive holdings here and there is even some foreign capital invested in Alaskan oil land.

# # #

Many vegetables bear more heavily in Alaska. Peas, for instance, will continue to bloom and to produce mature pods until frost—providing the moose don't harvest them first.

# # #

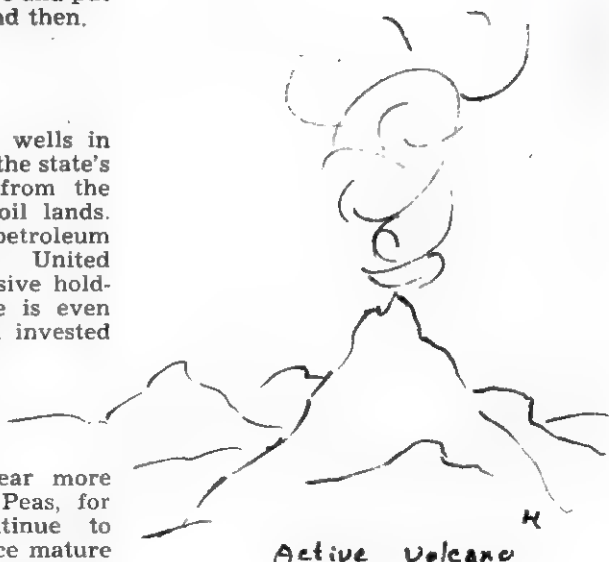
There are thousands of acres of wild berries in Alaska and only a token few are gathered each season. Lingonberries (lowbush cranberries), highbush cranberries, raspberries, salmonberries, currants and several varieties of blueberries are favorites.

# # #

Go fishing in winter? Certainly! In Alaska it is common practice to fish through the ice in winter. In the more northern regions many of the natives make a practice of procuring much needed food in this manner. It is a chore that can be accomplished by the older people who are not able to take part in the more vigorous pursuit of game.

# # #

There is no better place than Alaska for winter sports. Hockey, curling, skating and above all—skiing—are most popular. Fine skiing facilities are located in the vicinity of all major cities in the state. The annual international airline ski tournament is held at the Mt. Alyeska resort near Anchorage.





The Alaska Mountain Goat is a member of the chamois animal family; other members of which are found in mountainous areas of Europe and Asia. It is not a goat at all. No matter what it is called, it is one of the toughest of trophies to bag because of its chosen habitat on the crags of coastal mountains.

# # #

Alaskan homes are as modern as those in other parts of the United States. Snow houses are NOT the rule but it is true that many people live in igloos. The word "igloo" simply means "house" and not "snow house" as is the common belief of a great many statesiders.

# # #

The 49th state is the nesting ground for countless millions of wild fowl. The great river deltas of the north in particular, provide the ideal locations for many species of birds. Some come there to nest from as far away as the Antarctic. The Golden Plover flies no-stop from Hawaii to the Arctic to hatch and rear its young.

# # #

The Aleuts, Eskimos and Indians were the "early settlers" in Alaska. Eskimo legends relate how the Siberian Eskimos migrated to some parts of Alaska hundreds of years ago. There are more Eskimos than Aleuts or Indians. All three groups have full citizenship rights.

# # #

Cabbages weighing more than 60 pounds apiece have been harvested from Matanuska Valley farms. They are not the usual run of the garden though, but are grown especially for the fair. A turnip weighing 32 pounds was once entered in the fair at Palmer.



Bull Moose

The live weight of a well grown Alaskan bull moose is up to 1800 pounds. Many a hunter who has to back pack his meat for several miles is thankful that it is not all take-home meat, too.

# # #

Eskimos still make and use large skin boats. The walrus skin which is used is so thick it must be split in half in order to serve as a covering for the boat, which is commonly called an oomiak. The skins are so expertly fastened to the driftwood framework that there is little chance of leakage. They are capable of carrying a large payload—several tons.

# # #

Instead of being covered with ice and snow, as so many people from the south believe, there are thousands of places where the terrain is literally covered with bloom. In places it is actually impossible to step without treading on flowers. Numerous natural flower gardens are found in the Arctic too—right to the edge of the Arctic Ocean. Alpine meadows throughout the state are a riot of blossoming color in season.

# # #

A full grown bull walrus will sometimes weigh as much as a ton and a half. A large part of this weight is skin and a lot more is blubber. The flesh is one of the staple foods of the Eskimos. The tusks of the walrus are highly prized by the skilled Eskimo ivory carvers, since ivory carving is one of the principal sources of cash money for them.

# # #

Besides wildberries and mushrooms, there is a wide variety of edible plants to be found in Alaska. For the people who live in the bush or other remote places, such plants as sedum, nettles, dandelions, cow parsnip, spring beauty, wild chives, rice lily and the like are practically life savers at times. Rose hips, the fruit of the wild rose, is especially rich in Vitamin C and is used extensively in place of citrus fruit. It is made into syrup, jam and also mixed with berries to fortify them.



The cache (pronounced cash) of Alaska is a small storage unit built to be inaccessible to marauding animals. Trappers, homesteaders and others who live in the more remote areas use the cache as a primitive deep freeze in winter. In appearance it is not unlike a miniature log cabin mounted on stilts. The size depends on the need of the user.

# # #



Alaska is one of the few places where the elaborately carved totem poles can still be found. Some very fine examples can be viewed in parts of Southeastern Alaska. Totem carving is one of the native arts that is slowly dying out. The younger generation of the Indian tribes that once carved so many totems, does not seem to be interested in such painstaking craftsmanship.

